
PRESS & TELEVISION

The Media Lobby

"The Powers That Be *Lobbying*" by Sheila Kaplan, in *The Washington Monthly* (Dec. 1988), 1611 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

On Capitol Hill, the "media lobby"—representing TV broadcasters, cable TV, and newspaper and magazine publishers—is one of the most powerful. Do these guardians of the Fourth Estate spend their time crusading for First Amendment rights? "Occasionally," reports Kaplan, a freelance writer. "But the day-to-day work of a Washington media lobbyist focuses not so much on the front page as the bottom line."

And the odd thing is that the average American seldom sees news reports on the activities of these powerful lobbyists.

"The clout that the newspapers and broadcasters exert is the desire of every elected official to have favorable press attention," notes Lionel Van Deerlin, a former U.S. Representative. "When you hear from these guys, you listen." Campaign contributions are also a factor. Between 1985 and August 1988, Kaplan reports, the National Cable Television Association's political action committee (PAC) donated \$446,240 to candidates for federal office, and the National Association of Broadcasters' PAC gave \$307,986. Newspaper publishers, who have no PAC, made many individual donations.

In 1987, media lobbyists "pulled out the

stops" when two congressmen proposed to extend the ban on televised cigarette advertisements to newspapers and magazines. At stake: \$460 million in advertising revenues. The American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) took up arms, calling the measure a threat to free speech. The measure ultimately failed; Representative Mike Synar (D-Okla.) complained that "the ANPA are (sic) the water carriers for the tobacco industry." Few newspapers covered the controversy, says Kaplan; rarely was the ANPA's role cited by those that did.

Recently, the National Association of Broadcasters battled against a revival of the Fairness Doctrine and snuffed out an attempt on Capitol Hill to require free television air time for candidates for federal office (who spent an estimated \$400 million on TV ads during the 1986 campaign). Neither story got much play on evening TV news broadcasts; Gannett's *USA Today* called the Fairness Doctrine "stinkweed," neglecting to mention that its parent company owns 10 TV stations.

Quick to scrutinize other "special interests" and lobbyists, Kaplan concludes, journalists in Washington need to look at their own industry's role in politics.

Forget City Hall?

"Press Wars in Milwaukee" by Alan Ehrenhalt, in *Governing* (Jan. 1989), 1414 22nd St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

In 1962, Mayor Henry Maier of Milwaukee boasted of his excellent relations with the city's news media. *Time* magazine lauded the *Milwaukee Journal* for its intensive local coverage: "While *Journal* stories may seem too long and stodgy to outsiders, Milwaukeeans like the *Journal's* Germanic thoroughness."

However, after his recent retirement from office, Maier complained bitterly

about the *Journal's* scant coverage of City Hall. Other local officials have joined in. Tom Donegan, president of Milwaukee's Common Council criticizes what he calls the "soap opera approach" of the local news media.

Such complaints "are all variations on a national theme," writes Ehrenhalt, an editor at *Governing*. Across America, metropolitan dailies are increasingly skimping